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INFO ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2017  
TAGS: PREL ECON KWBG IS  
SUBJECT: DEPUTY MINISTER SNEH APPROVES EXPORTS THROUGH RAFAH

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR RICHARD H. JONES FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

GOI TO APPROVE EXPORTS FROM RAFAH

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¶1. (C) IN SEPARATE MEETINGS WITH THE AMBASSADOR, AND EMBASSY AND WORLD BANK STAFF, DEPUTY MINISTER OF DEFENSE EPHRAIM SNEH SAID THAT THE GOI WOULD APPROVE THE OPENING OF RAFAH FOR EXPORTS FROM GAZA BEGINNING IN MAY, TO COINCIDE WITH THE RENEWAL OF THE EUBAM MISSION. SNEH REMARKED THAT IF THE REQUIREMENT FOR EXPORTS THOUGH RAFAH WAS IN THE AGREEMENT FOR MOVEMENT AND ACCESS SIGNED BY THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT THEN HE HAD A RESPONSIBILITY TO FOLLOW THROUGH ON THE TERMS. HE NOTED THAT ISRAEL HAS "NO POLITICAL INTENT" TO HELP DEVELOP GAZA-EGYPT TRADE AND THAT INSTEAD THERE WOULD BE A NEED TO RESPOND TO INCREASED EXPORTS THROUGH GAZA BY UPGRADING THE OPERATION OF THE KARNI CROSSING. IN DISCUSSING NEXT STEPS WITH THE ECON COUNSELOR, WORLD BANK DIRECTOR AND THE USAID MISSION DIRECTOR, SNEH SUGGESTED THAT THEY JOINTLY PREPARE TRIAL SHIPMENTS TO WORK OUT SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS AND THE MECHANISM FOR OPENING RAFAH FOR EXPORTS. SECURITY REMAINED HIS MOST IMPORTANT CONCERN, SAID SNEH, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF THE PASSAGE OF TERRORISTS THROUGH RAFAH HIDDEN WITH EXPORTED GOODS NEEDED TO BE ADDRESSED.

OPENING THE JORDAN VALLEY

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¶2. (C) SNEH ALSO DISCLOSED THAT AFTER PASSOVER, (APRIL 2 TO 9), HE INTENDS TO OPEN ROUTE 90 IN THE JORDAN VALLEY TO PALESTINIAN PASSENGER TRAFFIC WITHOUT THE NEED FOR PERMITS. (NOTE: THE PERMIT REGIME HAS EFFECTIVELY BANNED PALESTINIANS FROM ENTERING THE JORDAN VALLEY UNLESS THEY COULD PROVE THEY OWNED OR WERE WORKING ON PALESTINIAN LAND IN THE VALLEY. END NOTE) THE CHECKPOINT AT BARDALEH, THAT WAS OPENED FOR PALESTINIAN TRUCK TRAFFIC SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, WOULD ONLY REQUIRE SECURITY CHECKS AS IS DONE AT OTHER WEST BANK CHECKPOINTS. SNEH SAID HE HAD TAKEN THIS DECISION OVER THE STRENUOUS OBJECTIONS OF THE JORDAN VALLEY SETTLERS WHO, THOUGH POLITICALLY MODERATE, WERE FIRMLY AGAINST PALESTINIANS TRANSITING ROUTE 90. HE EMPHASIZED THAT HE WAS PERSONALLY TAKING RISKS TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION IN THE WEST BANK.

EXTENDING THE GAZA FISHING LIMITS

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¶3. (C) THE AMBASSADOR NOTED THE EXTENSION OF THE THREE MILE FISHING LIMIT OFF OF GAZA TO SIX MILES INSTITUTED LAST WEEK AND ASKED WHETHER THERE WAS CONSIDERATION OF FURTHER EXTENSION TO STIMULATE THE GAZA ECONOMY. SNEH RESPONDED THAT THIS ISSUE WAS UNDER ACTIVE CONSIDERATION BUT THAT SECURITY CONCERN'S STILL PERSISTED. THE INCREASING EFFECTIVENESS OF EGYPTIAN EFFORTS TO STOP SMUGGLING ALONG THE BORDER WITH GAZA HAD INCREASED THE NUMBER OF SMUGGLING ATTEMPTS BY SEA ALONG THE GAZA COAST, ACCORDING TO SNEH. HOWEVER, SNEH DID PROMISE

TO RESPOND TO THE UPCOMING CUCUMBER HARVEST SEASON IN GAZA BY  
WORKING TO ENSURE THAT THE KARNI CROSSING REMAINS OPEN AND  
FACILITATES THE EXPORT OF PERISHABLE GOODS.

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VISIT EMBASSY TEL AVIV'S CLASSIFIED WEBSITE:  
<HTTP://WWW.STATE.SGOV.P/NEA/TELAVIV>

YOU CAN ALSO ACCESS THIS SITE THROUGH THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S  
CLASSIFIED SIPRNET WEBSITE.

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JONES